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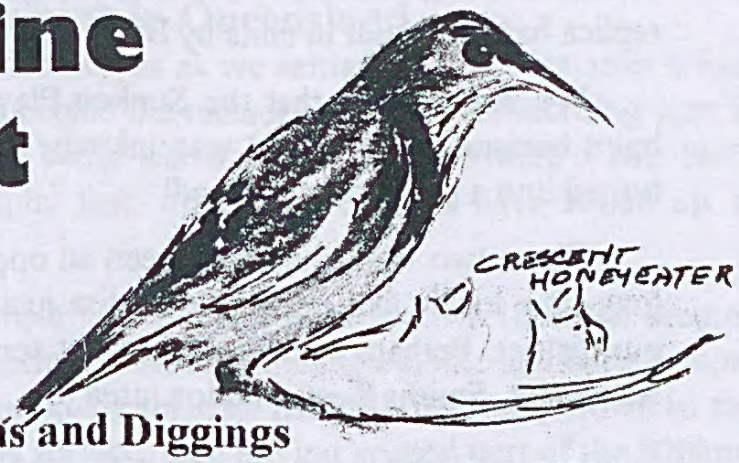

Gardens and Diggings

Over the past few months we have had two local speakers, Ian O'Halloran, who introduced us to the Diggings Project on the Friday night and took us for a tour of some of the project on Saturday afternoon. I, for one, learned a lot about the area (it was hard not to catch Ian's enthusiasm, which had started in his boyhood at Eaglehawk) even though I knew a little of it's history. While we learned quite a bit of the geology of the area and the workings of the mines we also enjoyed a little botany and bird watching, too.

At the June meeting it was Kevin Walsh's turn to introduce us to the Castlemaine Botanical Gardens, and to take us around his beloved "Bot Gardens" next day. We learned that the gardens have the third largest oak in Victoria down near the barbecue area, (the second largest is near the Expedition Pass road at Chewton), we learnt that some of the trees are getting very old, including the huge Caltalpa, and really should be replaced with some young specimens before they have to be removed. We learnt of the work of the Friends of the Botanical Gardens, who do a certain amount of cleaning up and planting, trying not to cut across Council responsibilities in the meantime, but taking opportunity to remind Council of their responsibilities!

The Friends hope to complete the replacement of the Lombardy Poplars between the Oak Avenue and the creek this winter.

The gardens also have plantings of the Butterfly Bush as their special effort - there are quite a number of different species, including some rare ones. Another rarity is a specimen of *Acacia farnesiana*. Kevin managed to propagate one specimen, but this died, so now he is hoping to propagate at least one more before the specimen gives up the fight to survive altogether.

Stone Pines are also not commonly found in gardens, nor are several other large trees, so we really have a botanical gardens to treasure.

We were shown where the Bowling Green used to be near the remains of one of the original footbridges, learnt that the Pipe Band Rooms were originally the Tea Rooms where you could buy tea, cakes and ice creams, and that that patch of asphalt on the railway side down towards the barbecue area is the original floor of

a summer house, which, by the time you get this CN, should be in place. The replica has been built in units by BRiT apprentices.

We also learned that the Sunken Playground was once Lake Augusta but it became stagnant, and was unkindly known as Lake Disgusta, so it was turned into a playground instead!

These two weekends have been an opportunity for us all, especially the long-time locals like myself, to realise just what treasures we have around our district. Perhaps we should find out some more about places like Mount Alexander, Smiths Reef, Maldon area too.

Rita Mills

Comparison Between Ridge Top and Gully Floor in Wattle Flat Forest

The tables give the result of 2 hectare 20 minute bird searches in Wattle Flat forest, Walmer , by Rita Mills and helpers. Monthly bird counts were made over 16 months on a ridge top and on a gully floor.

Birds recorded on ridge only

White-browed Scrub-wren	5
Western Gerygone	10
Australian Raven	5

More ridge records than gully

Little Raven	10	5
White-winged Chough	10	5
Scarlet Robin	20	5
Grey Shrike-thrush	30	5
Buff-rumped Thornbill	30	25

Equal number of records

White-eared Honeyeater	5	5
Yellow-faced Honeyeater	5	5
Galah	5	5
Sitella	5	5
Weebill	5	5
Brown Thornbill	10	10
grey Fantail	10	10
Golden Whistler	10	10
Striated Thornbill	20	20
Little Thornbill	25	25

More birds recorded in gully

Crimson Rosella	5	10
Yellow-rumped Thornbill	5	10
Magpie	10	20
Red Wattlebird	10	25
Rufous Whistler	10	20
Grey Currawong	25	40

Birds recorded in gully only

Common Bronzewing	5
Eastern Rosella	5
Kookaburra	5
Wedgetail Eagle	5
Yellow Robin	5
Willie Wagtail	5
Speckled Warbler	10
Striated Pardalote	10
White-throated Treecreeper	20
Spotted Pardalote	25
Blue Wren	45

Numbers give percentage of visits where each species was recorded.

Source: Rita Mills Bird Atlas records. Dec. 98 - May 00

The figures support the value of gully areas as habitat for fauna. Gullies are more sheltered, and usually have more fertile soil and more moisture.

Rita Mills, Em Perkins.

Bird Atlassing in Queensland

A warm outback evening welcomed us as we settled into Mt. Isa after a four hour flight from Brisbane, leaving behind the memory of an earlier morning start in fog and frost and the surprise of being asked at check-in, "Where's Mt. Isa?" fortunately I passed this geography test, otherwise, could I have ended up in Adelaide or Darwin?

Day One. The group didn't assemble until noon, so a trip down the mine seemed appropriate. Serious stuff, this - getting dressed in mining clobber and hung around with safety lamps, oxygen gear and going through the drill, but going down to the 21st level, one kilometre below the surface, then driving around part of the 900kms of underground workings, isn't to be taken lightly.

Out to Lake Moondarra in the afternoon to start the serious part of the bird survey in blocks seldom visited. Green Pigmy-geese, Egrets, White-bellied Sea-eagle, Jacana, Cockatiels, Varied Lorikeets, Red-winged Parrots. Spiny-cheeked Honeyeaters, Brown Honeyeaters, Painted Honeyeaters, Rufous Honeyeaters, Northern Fantails, five species of Woodswallows, Spotted Bowerbird, Zebra Finch, Pictorella Finch, Spinifexbird and Jabiru Storks was a good start, and this omits birds familiar to us in the South. A startling find was a Red-backed Kingfisher which we rescued. It was jammed by its wing in the fork of a branch. How it got there remains a mystery, but, if we hadn't turned up in time to release it on a seldom frequented bush track, it wouldn't have survived long with feral cats and Kites in the vicinity.

Day Two. First stop, Mikakoodi Gorge south of Cloncurry on the Duchess road where we quickly picked up the Kalkdoon race of the Dusky Grasswren, followed by the Rufous-crowned Emu-wren. Then onto "Top Camp" Spinifex country and we were amongst Emus for the next nine days, likewise Black Kites, Whistling Kites, Wedgetailed Eagles, Brown Falcons and Nankeen Kestrels. The best sightings of the day were Spinifex Pigeons, Channel-billed Cuckoo, Australian Nightjar, Blue-winged Kookaburra, Black-tailed Treecreeper, Variegated and White-winged Fairy-wrens, Banded Honeyeater and Apostlebirds.

That night we camped on the banks of the Cloncurry river and spotlighted Black-footed Rock Wallabies and Frogmouths, but there was no sign of the Night Parrot, our main quest.

A hint for birding in Spinifex and tall Mitchell Grass country. Outfit yourself with full length gaiters - it is very uncomfortable otherwise!

Day Three. Across the Western Plains through Duchess - once a mining town 4000 strong, but now just a well kept pub - and into Bloodwood, Beefwood and Sandalwood trees with grevillea and cassia everywhere, and onto the Mitchell Grass downs, which were looking superb after the best season for 30 or 40 years. Through Dajarra - once the railhead for 14 or more trains at a time, shipping stock

driven from across the Northern Territory and as far west as the Kimberly. Now, of course, it is all done by road trains.

That night we hunkered down on Kallala Station, a 500 square mile property, and were made most welcome by the owner despite the fact we had given no notice of our arrival. This was the day of the first sighting of the Black-breasted Buzzard, a magnificent bird of prey, then an Australian Hobby. Brolgas were seen every day taking advantage of the well watered plains. Banded Lapwings were also seen, and, at last, Budgerigars, moving as one in twisting, wheeling flocks, contrasting with the direct flight pattern of the Cockatiels.

Day Four. Surveys continued a kilometre apart on the way to Urandangie, another back-of-beyond pub showing road signs to Alice Springs and Birdsville. Flock Bronzewings first sighted, then Crimson Chats, the Great Bowerbird and , best of all, the Black Falcon. This is Min Min country - the strange lights that move erratically across the plains - so we interrogated the owner who, with typical country hospitality, thought the best answer was to give us half a rump of a beast which grilled perfectly, having been hung for a while, and there seemed no further interest in lights!

Day Five. Some overnight rain dried out quickly, and without delay we headed down the Boulia Road through some hillocky country between grasslands, and still in Night Parrot habitat, but the Night Parrot is still awaiting rediscovery after remaining elusive (or extinct) for may years. Still, Spotted Harriers were seen most days hereafter, then the Black Honeyeater, Red-capped Robins at last, and Ground Cuckoo-shrikes made up for our disappointment. But the most excitement this day was reserved for Painted Finches.

Day Six. Camped on the banks of the Diamantina amongst Eremophila trees and acacias. It was a day of excesses. First, the Wandering Whistling Duck, then the Australian Bustard and cheers all round for the Letter-winged Kite, a raptor seldom seen even on its home range, except when it irrupts during a plague of native rats.

Across the Georgina flood plains of Lignum and Sage Bush to front a host of Australian Pratincoles, 400 in one count alone, followed by an equal number of Black Kites catching small fish migrating upstream in the aftermath of the heavy floods, and Avocets and Black-winged Stilts. Finally, true to its name, a Gibberbird on the gibber plains after leaving the channel country on the way to Bedourie.

Day Seven. Crossed into Barcoo Shire on gravel and gibber plains. Watercourses marked by lines of Coolibahs, River Redgums and Belalie. Frost on clothes left out overnight, but the day soon warmed up. Met a party

of wild pigs, five adult and eleven young, crossing the road in salt bush country. A Chirruping Wedgebill was the best tick of the day as we settled into camp at Palparara Dam.

Day Eight. A day of contrasts. More Black Falcons and the one and only sighting of the Grey Falcon. More Spinifex Pigeons and Budgies unlimited. Brolgas still around, and three Bustards together, plus the Black-eared Cuckoo. Passed a drovers camp with 1100 head of cattle on the way to southern markets, then, of all things, a three camel wagon on the track to nowhere. Through Windorah, but then we had engine failure due to dust, and the air lock had to be cleared before crossing the Cooper and the more well-watered channel country. We turned off onto the Kyabra Road towards Eromanga, but fate intervened and forced an early camp when the trailer tow bar showed fracturing. However, all was not lost as we found Bourkes Parrot, then the Spotted Nightjar, in the Mulga woodlands of the sandy soils.

Day Nine. Still carried on with the surveys before deciding about the trailer, as we were 134 kms from Quilpie and welding repairs. More Bourkes Parrots as well as Bluebonnets, a pair of Major Mitchells, Ground Cuckoo-shrikes and a juvenile Black-breasted Buzzard, but the best find was the Chestnut Quail-thrush. In the afternoon we limped down the road to Quilpie for trailer repairs.

Day Ten. Stayed overnight in Quilpie and found the Red-tailed Black Cockatoo and the Plum-headed Finch in town. Gidgee scrublands were showing the browse line of earlier drought times. Now we were on the northern edge of the Murray-Darling basin; the southern edge being the inland slopes of Castlemaine - a long way away! Crossed the Paroo and set up camp amongst Striped Honeyeaters, Red-winged Parrots and Halls Babblers, the best find of the day, followed by the Speckled Warbler and Brown-headed Honeyeater.

Day Eleven. Looking for Redthroats in hopbush country, but no confirmed sightings as we headed on the Charleville, then south to Cunnamulla, passing into Callitris pines and sandhills, with lunch under a Wilga tree. The final camp on the Warrego River on the Bowra property was in pristine woodlands still untouched by axe or plough. Many birds, including the Splendid Fairy-wren, completed the count as we passed from the Western Plains into irrigated cotton landscapes, through St George to Goondiwindi and Warwick, the end of the formal survey.

In all, 208 species were recorded.

Chris Morris

Observations

• Debbie Worland spotted a lone Noisy Friarbird on the Castlemaine Golf Course in the early part of June. The different call first attracted her attention, and later she was able to locate the bird because the Red Wattlebirds and Noisy Miners were busily bombing something in one of the trees. On the morning of the Highway Cleanup she took four of the club members to see it before we started the cleanup,

and the Wattlebirds and Noisy Miners were still there - and so was the Noisy Friarbird, despite their efforts to hunt it away.

Debbie has seen a great variety of birds over the last few months. At their property in Ross Road, Muckleford, last year a Nankeen Night-heron roosted a couple of times. Latham's Snipe were seen in February and March this year on the Golf Course near the dams and Black-faced Woodswallows, usually two, were seen in the canopy of the Red Gums on the Course on several occasions from Nov. 15 to Jan 30., and this year small groups of Purple-crowned Lorikeets were still on the Course in June, but only one Grey-crowned Babbler has been seen in the past few weeks.

• Dora Berenyi has a mouse trap which does not kill the animal, but leaves the "setter" to deal with it, which is just as well, as recently she discovered that the trap contained a Yellow-footed Antechinus - and half a dead mouse. The Antechinus is not a bad little mouser itself - and more environmentally friendly than a cat!

• Two of the U3A walking group reported that Cootamundra is flowering already in mid June. One tree in Preshaw Street was in full flower, and quite a few trees in and around Moscript Street had some flowers.

• Also on the U3A walk along the Castlemaine end of the Maldon railway is a tree with a root apparently, growing across it above ground level - at least it is above ground level now. George Evans has been watching it for more than twenty years, because when he first spotted it the growing trunk had pulled the root apart, and there was a gap of about 5 cm. Now the gap has widened to about 40 cms.

• The Dusty Miller, *spyridium* parviflorus was seen in flower on the ridge at the north end of Youngmans track 17/6/00 and the local hakea has been in flower for two or three weeks in the Wattle Flat bush. Rita Mills

• During the last excursion several people thought they heard a Crescent Honeyeater, but couldn't see anything, however, on Sunday 18/6 Ern and Lesley Perkins decided to take advantage of the sunshine and went for a walk in the gardens. They again thought they heard the Crescent Honeyeater, and finally spotted one over the other side of the creek in the rough area, close enough not to need binoculars. On the way back over the bridge they spotted a second one, another male. Several other people have confirmed the sightings....

• .... and then, on Sat. 23/6 near Vanston Road, on the track to Moonlight Flat Pine Plantation, three Crescent Honeyeaters were seen, and on the fire dam about ½ km away, another one seen while another one was heard calling on the other side of the track. Margaret Badminton and Rita Mills.

• On the U3A walk on Sugarbag Rd, Fryerstown 28/6/00 the first sprigs of Golden Wattle (*A. pycnantha*) and *Grevillea alpina* starting to flower. Also, there was a great variety of different fungi, including the one with a reddish cap, cream gills and a pink stem. Rita Mills

FROM THE BUSINESS MEETING. 22/6/00

• There is a **Public Information** night for **Box/Ironbark** on the Wed July 19 at 7.30 pm in the Phee Broadway theatre. On the following morning July 20 at 9.30

• at 27 Doveton **St. all members are urged to attend** a meeting to decide on Club Policy regarding the **Box-Ironbark Forests & Woodlands** draft Report from the E.C.C. A submission will be forwarded to the E.C.C. based on the findings of this meeting.

• The Club has decided **direct seed the Butterfly area** of the Gardens.

• Regarding **the Broom Pull on Thursday Aug. 17;** Rob Price will be there with a group of Tafe people to help us. We will, as is usual, need sturdy footwear, gloves, a drink, and a snack if you need one, a kneeling pad is not a bad idea, and a raincoat "in case". A sausage sizzle and barbecue will be provided by the club for lunch, but BYO drinks.

• The Highway Cleanup was again a success, but took longer (about 1¼ hours this time) as only seven members were able to attend. The clean-up needs to be done every couple of months.

• A suggestion is being made that we keep a record of events, similar to what Alan Reid has suggested, and sample sheets will be available at the general meeting. Anyone willing to give a hand in this project is asked to take one of the sheets. The project will be further explained at the meeting. It won't be difficult, and it should be very interesting.

• **Gluepot Campout** We have decided that we will all make our own way to Waikerie in time to meet at 9.30 on Sunday Oct. 10 at the Shell Service Station where the key to the property is kept, and go on to Gluepot, which is 60kms north of Waikerie, in convoy. **If you are interested in going be sure to get a brochure, which explains what facilities are, or are not, available**. We need to take our own water.

• **Spring Wildflower Walks** will commence on Wednesday Sept. 6 at 4pm. These walks last approximately an hour and are usually within 6 km, seldom as much as 10 km, of the town. **We are looking for leaders**. If you have a favourite spot you are willing to take us to visit, please let one of the Committee know. You don't have to be an expert, or even know much at all about the area. These outings are "ramble, explore and enjoy", and you are welcome to bring any visitors.

• **Newsletters Etc.** available for borrowing -

✓ "Where to find Birds in the Mount Alexander District" - brochure now available.

✓ "Where Regents Roam" -NL for the Regent Honeyeater Recovery Network.

✓ "Grass Clippings" - Grassy Box Woodland NL The Bird Observer magazine.

✓ "Wirrakee", NL for Bendigo FNC.

✓ "The Web", NL for the Threatened Species Network - including an article on the rare and unusual Spiral Sun Orchid.

✓ Each month the club receives Newsletters from several other clubs, including Sunraysia and Ballarat.

PROGRAMME

EXCURSIONS **General Meetings** Are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) hall, at 8.00pm on the second Friday of each month, except January. Entrances to the car parks are beside the Church building in Lyttleton Street.

Excursions leave promptly at times stated, usually on the Saturday after the general meeting.

Business Meetings are held at 38 Campbell Street on the 4th Thursday of each month, except December, at 7.30pm. All members are invited to attend.

VISITORS ARE ALWAYS WELCOME TO CLUB MEETINGS AND EXCURSIONS

Fri. July 14. **Our favourite places of interest in Victoria**. UCA hall, 8pm. You probably have a favourite nature spot that you like to visit, camp for a weekend or spend a week or two. Share it with the Club, with a few slides or photos to lure us with, and info. on place, distance, camping grounds and facilities, or motel accommodation if you can.

Thur. July 20. Meeting re. Club response to Box/Ironbark draft report. See p7.

Sat July 15. **Fungi, Bullarto Reservoir.** Leave 13 Mostyn St. at 1.30pm.. Leader, G. Broadway

Fri. Aug. 11. **Gluepot, its History and Natural History.** Speaker is Dr David Baker-Gabb, long-time member of RAOU, now Birds Australia. UCA hall, 8 pm.

Sat. Aug. 12 **Huntly - Wirrakee Wattle and a Woodlot**. Leader is E. Perkins. Leave 13 Mostyn Street at 1.30 sharp.

Thurs. Aug. 17. **Broom Pull.** Meet at the cr. of Froomes Rd. and Mary St. at 9.30am. More details p.7.

Wed. Sept 6. First of the weekly **Spring Wildflower Walks.** Leave 27 Doveton St. at 4 pm, back around 5.30pm.

Fri. Sept. 8. **Eucalypts of the Mount Alexander region.** Speaker is Ern Perkins. UCA hall. 8pm.

Sat Sept. 9. **The Real Thing** A tour of some of the diverse Eucalypt areas of the district. Leader is E. Perkins.

Sat 9 - Wed 13 Sept. **-Campout at Gluepot** . See p.7.

Sun. Oct. 8. **Castlemaine Box/Ironbark Forest in Spring.** An Excursion with Ballarat F.N.C. Leader is E. Perkins.

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Disclaimer - The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributor and not necessarily those of the club.

2000 Committee M. Dredge (President) ph 5470 6474 E. Perkins (V.P. and Grievance Officer), G. Broadway (Sec.). ph. 5472 2513, J. Turnbull (treas.) ph. 5474 3005, R. Mills (N/L Ed. and P.O.), M. Oliver, C. Morris, K. Turner, Z . Thomas. B. Maund .

Subscriptions for 2000 -

Ordinary Membership: Single ,$22 Family, $30

Pensioner or student: Single $19 Family $24

Supporting: $31 The subscription also covers postage of the 'Castlemaine Naturalist'.

Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.
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